

Holy Cross Retreat



Letter 199

8th December, 2023

Advent Greetings,



Christmas cards



Maureen Barns will have home-made Christmas cards for sale after Mass this Sunday. Maureen donates all proceeds to Holy Cross. She and John will be out the front after Mass.

Looking ahead

The **Coffee Cart** will be in operation on **Sunday December 17th**, and then again on **Sunday February 25th**

Christmas Eve Mass will be earlier this year. **7.00pm** on **Sunday 24th December**. As usual this will be preceded by Christmas Carols (**from 6.15pm**) and weather permitting this will all take place 'under the trees' (parking on the oval). Please BYO chair.

Our helpers

Last week we acknowledged our various liturgical helpers. This week we want to acknowledge our maintenance assistants, including our Friday 'A Team' ([John Stretch](#), [Graham Newcomb](#), [Ed Porad](#) and [Frank Vanden Boom](#)), [Peter Norman](#), [Bruno Petrocco](#), [Vince Celestino](#) and [Fr Chris!](#) We are also grateful for the generous help of the St Gabriel's Committee and acknowledge the wonderful work the community members do each week on garden and lawn maintenance. [Bro Jerome](#) deserves special mention for his work in the 'back' garden, especially since he has been hampered this year by a number of medical issues.

Eggs



For those concerned, the next delivery day for eggs is Monday December 18th and following that, Monday January 15th 2024.

Come Away days at Holy Cross

The Come Away Day team met during the week to review this year's program and commence its planning for 2024. Sr Brigid is key to the team and this was

acknowledged by those present, each of whom themselves have generously contributed. Joseph and Erick have participated throughout the year and led an Anointing and Eucharistic liturgy on each Come Away day. The team meets a few weeks before each Come Away day to consider a theme and then how this theme can be expressed in the times of input, sharing and reflection.

[Frank Burke](#) is stepping away from the team after four years' service. Frank has been particularly involved in correspondence, advertising and reporting on each 'day', as well as welcoming participants and contributing his own expertise as a spiritual director. We thank you Frank for his contribution to this important Passionist ministry at Holy Cross Retreat. We wish Frank well as he will be devoting more time to family concerns. I was pleased to attend the review and planning meeting and extend to the team members our sincere appreciation for this outreach to people seeking spiritual solace. The 'Come Away Day' programme for 2024 will be published early in January.



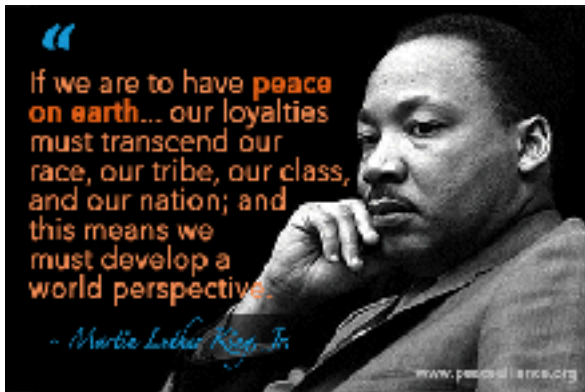
Team members standing from left to right: [Brian CP](#), [Joey CP](#), [Lien Thai](#), [Kay Lewis](#), [Frank Burke](#), [Erick CP](#) and seated, [Pam Storey](#) and [Brigid CP](#).

Advent in a time of war
Reconciling peace with a thirst for justice

'The Editors'Commonweal

This year began with one war in the headlines and ends with two. The war in Ukraine, so shocking when it began in February 2022, is now a dismally familiar feature of the news, grinding on as destructively as ever with no end in sight. The war in Gaza, which began less than two months ago, has already changed the Middle East forever.

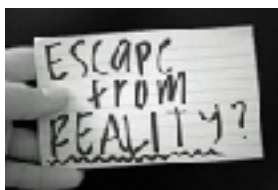
The governments of many countries, including the US, had been hoping that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—as old as Israel itself—would simply disappear over time



as younger generations of Palestinians resigned themselves to statelessness. Now we know better. Despair may sometimes lead to resignation, but more often it leads to rage. Meanwhile, beyond the headlines, other conflicts carry on largely unnoticed in this country: civil wars in Sudan and Myanmar, savage gang violence in Haiti. Behold, the world brings us bad tidings, again and again. Peace on earth? Not now or anytime soon.

In such times, Advent’s beautiful message may appear unrealistic or even impertinent. Herod’s massacre of the innocents seems more relevant. Karl Marx famously described religion as “the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions...the opium of the people.” Even many believers would agree that this is an all-too-plausible account of religion. Whatever else it may be, faith is a comfort, and sometimes the most appropriate prayer—or the only *possible* prayer—is a sigh.

Does that make religion nothing more than an opium? We shouldn’t be too quick to answer no. Wherever it is offered as an excuse to ignore “soulless conditions,” wherever the earthly suffering of others is glossed over as a mere prelude to heavenly



compensations, religion does indeed function as an opium, and those who offer it on these terms are little better than drug dealers. The burden is on us to show that faith is not just a form of escapism or, as the kids say, a “cope.” It may get us through life (if we’re lucky), but it does not get us around life’s central problems. And if it does, or seems to, then we’re doing it wrong.

One central problem for Christians now is how to reconcile two of the beatitudes in our lives as citizens—how to be peacemakers while also hungering and thirsting for justice. In the real world, those seeking peace and those demanding justice often seem to be deeply at odds.



To the makers and keepers of peace, the demand for justice may look like an ill-disguised call for vengeance. In the days following Hamas's brutal acts of terrorism in southern Israel, we heard a lot about Israel's "right to defend itself," because this right is recognized by everyone except those who wish to see Israel destroyed. But Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, while asserting this right, also promised a "[mighty vengeance](#)." For

peacemakers, the difference between defence and vengeance is not trivial: defence is about the future, vengeance about the past. Insofar as the bombardment of Gaza entails the collective punishment of thousands of innocent civilians for the past actions of Hamas, it cannot honestly be described as "defence," or as Israel's right.

Meanwhile, to those who hunger and thirst for justice—to the families of those killed or abducted by Hamas, or to the Palestinian parents digging their dead children out from the rubble of their bombed homes—those speaking only of peace may seem to exhibit an obscene lack of concern. "Let bygones be bygones" is easy advice to offer from ten thousand kilometres away. Rejecting that advice, angry protestors in New York and London chant, "No justice, no peace." Yet it is hard to believe that the kind of justice demanded either by Hamas or by right-wing Israeli politicians could ever lead to peace.



Both can imagine peace only by imagining the total destruction of their enemies. But as Andrew J. Bacevich argues ("[The Israel-Gaza War Will Fail](#)," page 12), what they are imagining is a fantasy; there will be no military solution to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, no total victory for one side or the other. As Bacevich writes, "At the end of the day, coexistence remains the only road to peace."

Advent is the time when Christians prepare to celebrate the coming of the Prince of Peace, who appeared not as a conquering hero, but as a vulnerable infant in a small town in what is now the West Bank. He preached forgiveness, offered mercy, then died a criminal's death at the hands of an empire that defined peace as domination. Until he comes again, there will be wars and rumours of wars, and leaders who invite us to sacrifice peace—or at least postpone it—for the sake of a perfect and therefore illusory security. One way to demonstrate that our faith in Christ is more than an opium is to reject that false bargain.

Advent: Week 2 - Peace

A Native American grandfather was explaining to his grandson about his feelings. He said, "I feel as if I have two wolves fighting in my heart. One wolf seeks revenge and it

INSIDE YOU THERE ARE TWO WOLVES



is angry, and violent. The other wolf is loving and compassionate. This fight between two wolves is going on inside you too, and inside every other person". The grandson asked him, "Which wolf will win the fight in my heart?" The grandfather said, "the one that you feed".

At this 'moment' when there is talk of peace, we are likely to immediately think of the situation in Gaza, in Ukraine and other places where there is armed conflict. We deplore the deaths of innocent people, especially women and children.

The famous Christmas Carol 'Let there be Peace on Earth', challenges us, to realise that peace begins 'with me'. Do we make peace with others? Do we initiative forgiveness? Mahatma Gandhi once said that if we practice 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth', the world will be full of blind and toothless people! Do we take the initiative to reconcile? Do we feed the right wolf?

Izzeldin Abuelaish was born and raised in the Jabalia refugee camp in the Gaza Strip and became a doctor specializing in gynecology. He is the father of eight children. On December 12th 2008 Izzeldin's wife died from leukaemia, two weeks after diagnosis. Three months later his home was deliberately targeted and shelled twice by Israeli tanks. Three of his daughters and his niece were killed. Another daughter and his brother were badly injured. Over a three week Israeli offensive, 1,400 Palestinians and 12 Israelis were killed.



At a news conference the following day Izzeldin said, *"I want them to know that I am from Jabalia camp. I am Palestinian. And we can live together. There is no difference between Palestinian and Israelis. Within the borders of the hospital, all are equal. Why not be equal outside? Why not? My children were involved in peace. They participated in many peace camps everywhere. They were weaponed when they killed them. They were weaponed not by arms; they were weaponed by love"*. Later he added, *"The weapons with which I equipped my daughters were education, with knowledge, with dreams, with hopes, with loves. The word peace has lost its meaning. We should find something else: respect, equality, justice and partnership. That's what we should look for"*.



This echoes St Francis' famous words: *"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace, where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair,*

hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.” We are instruments of peace whenever we act in a way that promotes peace or avoids prolonged conflict. Central to this is the gift of forgiveness – of avoiding retaliation. That is what Jesus showed.

We value a life free of anxiety, disturbance and conflict. While many desperately seek external peace, everyone wherever they live, seeks inner peace. True peace has to come from within. True peace accepts the struggles, troubles, misfortunes and sufferings of life and wears them like a smile. For us, true peace comes from a deep belief that God is always walking beside us and is most often experienced in the compassion and support of our brothers and sisters, who reveal God’s spirit.

In 2016 Sr Cecilia Maria a Carmelite sister from Santa Fe, Argentina, died from tongue and lung cancer, aged 43. She was unable to talk in the final months of her life, but her fellow sisters, family and friends remarked on how peaceful she was despite intense discomfort.



If you want to save a thousand words to describe true peace – look at this photo taken just before Sr Cecelia Maria died. She was a young woman totally confident of God’s love and totally at peace - content, despite her suffering and despite dying at a young age.

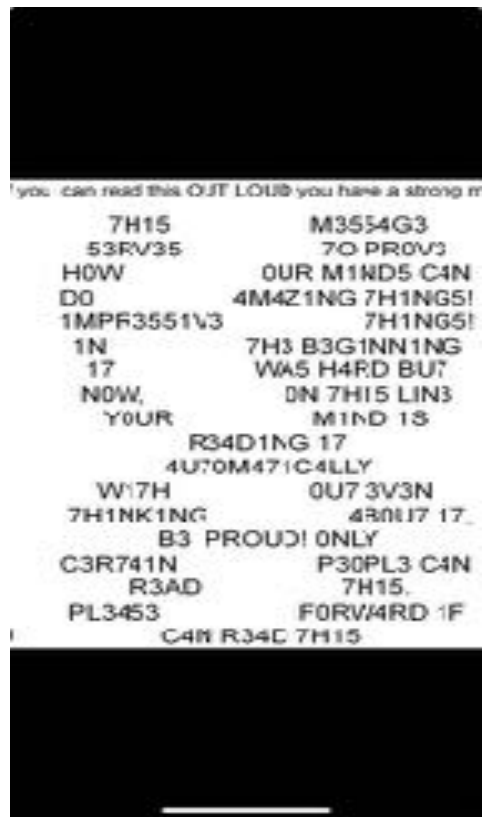
Where does your peace come from?

Chris’ most recent book



In 1945 outside a town in Upper Egypt, an Arab farmer found an earthenware jar filled with thirteen papyrus books. These were Coptic translations of ancient Greek texts that included the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of truth and the Gospel to the Egyptians. Along the Gospel of Mary and Gospel of Judas, these are referred to as the Gnostic (knowledge) gospels.

Chris’ book provides an overview of this large set of writings. The aim is to offer an appreciation of their contexts and content as well as develop a better understanding of the people of faith that produced and preserved these texts. This is the 18th book in the ‘Friendly Guide’ series and is available at the special price of \$20. Please contact Chris or Mayrose in the Office asap.



Humour





NURSE CAME IN AND SAID DOC, THERE'S A MAN IN THE WAITING ROOM WHO THINKS HE'S INVISIBLE, WHAT SHOULD I TELL HIM? THE DOCTOR SAID TELL HIM I CAN'T SEE HIM TODAY.

How do you feel when you can't get to your Advent calendar chocolate?



Foiled!

How many letters are in the Christmas alphabet?



25 - there's no L!

Why is it getting harder to buy Advent calendars?



Their days are numbered!

Why don't you ever see Father Christmas in hospital?



He has private elf care!

How does Good King Wenceslas like his pizzas?



Deep pan, crisp and even!

What do you get if you cross a Christmas tree and an iPad?



pineapple!

1. A woman ran a red traffic light and crashed into a man's car. Both of their cars were demolished, but amazingly neither of them was hurt. After they crawled out of their cars, the woman said; "Wow, just look at our cars! There's nothing left, but fortunately, we are unhurt. This must be a sign from God that we should meet and be friends and live together in peace for the rest of our days." The man replied, "I agree with you completely. This must be a sign from God!"

The woman continued, "And look at this, here's another miracle. My car was completely demolished, but my bottle of 75-year-old scotch didn't break. Surely God meant for us to drink this vintage delicacy and celebrate our good fortune". Then she handed the bottle to the man. He nodded his head in agreement, opened it, drank half the bottle, and then handed it back to the woman. The woman took the bottle, immediately put the cap back on, and handed it back to the man. The man asked, "Aren't you having any?" She replied, "Nah. I think I'll just wait for the police!"

2. Bill was at the bar bragging about his athletic prowess. A visitor to the pub said to the Bill, "I bet you I can push something in a wheelbarrow for one block, and you can't push it back". Bill looked at the skinny stranger and said "You're on". The crowd accompanied them to the closest corner where a wheelbarrow was presented. Bill said with some arrogance, "OK let's see what you are made of". The challenger said, "OK. Get in!"

3. A magician accidentally changed his wife into a couch. He called an ambulance and his wife was rushed to hospital. Half an hour later he phoned to check on his wife's condition. The doctor said "she is resting comfortably"

4. At an airport counter a small boy with his mother told the agent he was two years old. The man looked at him closely and said, "Do you know what happens to little boys who lie?" The boy replied, "Yes they get to fly at half=price.

5. AI pilot announced, "Ladies and gentlemen I have some good news and some bad news. The bad news is that we have a hijacker on board. The good news is that he wants to go to the French Riviera".

One Day

Although it was included in last week's newsletter, there were many comments of appreciation for this song being played at Mass last Sunday. Turn it up and join in at home: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XqvKDCP5-xE>

Prayers

We remember those whose anniversaries occur around this week, especially

Marg Hogan (John's wife) (December 7th)

Mary Jane Harkins (December 7th)

Merna Monagan (Chris' mother) (December 10th)

Norma Watson (Len's mother)

Isabelle Hughes (December 10th)

Frank Jordan (Married to Kathleen) (December 11th)

Rosa Mandile (Cathy Hardinge's mother) (December 11th)

John Sheehan (December 12th)

Maree Spinks (Noel's wife) (December 15th)

Prayers

Today, Fr Gary Perritt is undergoing heart surgery in Strathfield hospital, Sydney, and Preston Epplert (our long-standing NZ PFGM accountant) is undergoing back surgery in Wellington. Your prayers for their recovery will be appreciated. Also Denis Addicoat (Peter's brother, is in Hobart hospital after suffering a heart attack while in Hobart for Peter's 50th ordination celebrations.

We remember all others in our Holy Cross family who are unwell, especially..



Marie Foale RSJ, Jeff Foale CP, Denis Addicoat, Maree Bartoli, Mary Dunn, Monique (Cathy H's daughter), Tony Tome, Pam Storey, Peter McNamara, Peter & Bernadette Owen, Dawn Heffernan, Alexander Lim, Maeve Reardon, Phil Drew, Monica and Anthona Hennessy, Gerry Bond, Bronwyn Burke, Helen McLean, Michael O'Callaghan, Sr Gen Walsh RSC, Greg Agosta, Mary Hackett, Pam Gartland, Errol Lovett, Patricia Keeghan, Kate Dunn, Anne Jenkins, Chris O'Toole, Gerald Quinn CP

The **Mass link** for this Sunday will be sent on Saturday by Chris.

Brian